

Health

Wear and tear of joints



Kathryn Borg

and rest your palm on the desk. Lift your hand up to use your computer mouse, and avoid prolonged use of the thumb to pinch objects.

The third most common sites of joint wear and tear are the foot and the ankle. The ankle is a pure hinge-joint that can flex, extend and point the toes up by 30 degrees, down by 80 degrees, by 30 degrees towards the body and by 60 degrees outwards.

Although walking is good exercise, gait problems can lead to excessive wear and tear on these joints. The faster and harder your feet hit the floor, the more damage is done to cartilage. Wearing non-supportive shoes can also wear out cartilage, as

this allows the foot to roll inwards. Ankle sprains damage joint ligaments, resulting in an unstable joint that can lead to loss of cartilage by friction.

Wearing an ankle support for a short time can support the ankle while it repairs itself, but be careful not to put your weight on a sprained ankle. If you continue to use the ankle excessively, you may be left with stretched ligaments that can predispose you to repeated twisting of the ankle in the future.

Finally, the neck. It is controlled by the top three vertebrae of the spine that lie just beneath the skull. When you bend your head forward, as when ironing, you are putting a

strain on the last vertebra of the neck.

Wear and tear on the joints of the neck is increasing because of the growing number of people who sit for hours in front of the computer screen with bad posture. Viewed from the side, the neck bones are hinged at the back and on bending forward, exert tight vice-like compression of the vertebrae discs. Chronic compression leads to disc damage, especially the lowest one in the neck.

Activities such as ironing, weeding, slouching on a sofa, driving the car with the back rest in a back-slanting position, and bad posture at the computer, all force the neck joints to bend forward and to cause

compression that damages the discs.

To avoid wear and tear on the neck, your computer should be positioned so that you can sit up straight with your back supported and your feet flat on the floor. The screen should be directly in front of you at eye level. Avoid looking downwards when working on your computer, or when gardening or ironing. Try not to slouch and avoid repeatedly turning your neck sideways for long periods of time.

Many activities and jobs can lean towards these positions. To help your joints, be aware of, and continually correct your posture and positioning throughout the day.

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As we grow older some joints in our bodies show more wear and tear. Our genes, diet and general state of health all play a part in how long our cartilage lasts. The length of time the cartilage lasts will have an effect on the wear and tear of our joints. Avoiding unnecessary wear and tear in our joints will help to limit joint damage.

An area that is especially subject to wear is the elbow. It is designed to bend and straighten as well as roll the forearm from side to side. Most elbow problems happen when the joint is extended and rotated at the same time.

If you grip a golf club, racket or tool too hard or for too long, you can develop what is known as golfer's or tennis elbow. This is when the forearm tendons, which stretch over the elbow joint, become sore and tender; this in turn, can wear down the cartilage. Golfer's elbow affects the inner side of the elbow, while tennis elbow affects the outer side.

“To avoid wrist strain injury, tilt your hand upwards to type and rest your palm on the desk”

With a grip that is too tight, the tops of the bones nearest to the elbow are pulled out of alignment by the tiniest fraction, causing cartilage wear and tear and, eventually, joint damage. Increasing handle diameters and using splints will support the tendons and protect the elbow.

The second area I want to look at is the wrist. This is a hinge joint and can usually be bent up by 90 degrees, down by 70 degrees, outwards by 25 degrees and inwards by 65 degrees.

Wear and tear often shows up in the joints of the fingertips, which can become red, swollen and tender. As the cartilage is worn down, the bone becomes lumpy and bumpy or fuses together, skewing the fingers sideways. Computer users are especially vulnerable to wear and tear of this joint.

Additionally, another common site of damage is the base of the thumb, where cartilage is worn down by repetitive twisting, turning or gripping during activities such as sewing, knitting and manual jobs such as stapling papers together for prolonged periods of time, or by repeated minor trauma involving the tendons of the hand, as seen in boxers.

To avoid such repetitive strain injury, tilt your hand upwards to type



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